

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

FINAL REPORT

GEORGIA

USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EE-A-97-00016-00

July 1, 1997 to July 31, 2000

I. SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) signed a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development in July 1997 to conduct democratic development work in Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan through June 1999. A subsequent one-year extension for programming in Georgia was approved through July 31, 2000. This document reports on NDI's objectives and activities in **Georgia** in this three-year period and assesses the impact of those activities.

As part of this cooperative agreement, NDI conducted programs in Georgia aimed at strengthening political parties and civic groups and at assisting reform of the national legislature and local government. During the period of this agreement, NDI has:

- aided the development of Georgia's democratic political parties at both the national and regional level.
- supported the growth of Georgia's nonprofit civic sector, including building the largest election monitoring organization in Georgia.
- assisted the parliament to draft reform legislation and helped the body as a whole become more open and responsive to the public.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Georgia's Political Situation

Since winning independence from the Soviet Union nine years ago, the new state of Georgia has suffered extraordinary upheavals including a coup d'etat, civil war and two long-running conflicts resulting in the secession of two regions. Despite these problems, Georgia has made significant progress in democratic development. Three parliaments have been elected since independence and a new constitution adopted in 1995 created a separation of powers along the lines of the U.S. system. Competitive political parties have emerged, with the parliamentary elections of 1999 giving a decisive edge to the ruling, reform-minded Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), which has been supportive of civic activism and a vibrant civic sector.

Georgia's government continues to face serious challenges in building a unified, democratic state. Most of Georgia's Black Sea coast is virtually independent of Tbilisi's control. Regional tensions in northern and southern borderlands pose threats of further secessions. Georgia recently has begun a process of decentralization, including creating more than one thousand elected local councils in 1998. This same process, however, risks fragmenting and dividing the country. Georgia's leaders have the difficult task of uniting the country around a national agenda while balancing popular demands for local autonomy.

As in many post-soviet states, endemic corruption threatens the nation's political and economic development. Corruption flourished during the chaos of the Soviet collapse and civil war, as supply lines solidified into regional fiefdoms of economic and political power. Today, corruption remains pervasive. One of its consequences, the government's inability to collect revenues, has led to a loss of foreign financial support and drastic budget cuts. Georgia's leaders must move beyond rhetoric and symbolic actions in addressing this problem.

The ruling CUG has been credited with much of Georgia's recent success. Questions have been raised, however, about its performance in recent elections. President Shevardnadze was re-elected in a contest marred by fraud. Both the leadership and ideological orientation of the CUG is in flux. Disagreements within party ranks have recently led to the formation of splinter groups. The only serious opposition, the Revival Party, has strong authoritarian tendencies. To protect its nascent democracy and fragile independence, Georgia must introduce reforms that place meaningful checks on central government authority and encourage a viable democratic opposition.

B. NDI's Past Work in Georgia

NDI's involvement in Georgia dates to October 1992, when the Institute organized an international delegation to observe parliamentary elections. Two years later, NDI returned to Georgia to establish a permanent office in Tbilisi. Since then, NDI has developed a multifaceted set of programs that respond in an integrated way to the Georgian political situation.

Asked to support the drafting of a new constitution, the Institute began its work in the parliament. Once the constitution had been adopted, granting significant authority to the national legislature, parliamentary leaders invited NDI to advise them on making the body more responsive and open to the Georgian public, and improving factions' effectiveness. NDI's programs to strengthen parties stem naturally from, and continue to complement, efforts to increase the stature and professionalism of the parliament. The Institute's assistance to civic groups evolved from an interest in promoting public confidence in elections through domestic monitoring, and in finding ways citizens could constructively, voice their interests to the parliament and parties. With the election of local councils for

the first time in late 1998, NDI's efforts to encourage citizen participation in Georgian public affairs extended beyond the national to the regional level.

NDI's approach in Georgia is premised on the belief that democratic decision-making requires the participation of all actors in the political process. Through its synergetic approach to democratic development in Georgia, the Institute has heightened the impact of individual programs. Each activity has reinforced progress in other areas.

The programs' results have been made possible by both financial support and a constructive, open relationship with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

III. PROGRAMMING

A. Parliamentary Development Programs

NDI has assisted the Georgian parliament since 1994, when it was invited to lend its expertise to the development of a new constitution. Programs have strengthened the legislative and oversight functions of parliamentary committees; promoted strategic organization within parliamentary factions; provided guidance on relations with constituents; and helped the parliament institute programs to educate citizens about the legislative process. With NDI's assistance, a public relations department was established in 1997, which produces and distributes materials to the public, conducts daily tours of the parliament, and offers a page system allowing students first-hand legislative and political experience. NDI programs have further contributed to the development of legislation concerning local government, elections, ethics, freedom of information, and civic advocacy. For example, following a March 1997 seminar on conflict of interest, the parliament adopted legislation requiring financial disclosure by members of parliament, government ministers, and other public officials.

In the period covered by this report, NDI continued to build on a long record of assistance programs to the parliament including the promotion of cohesion within factions, consultations to parliamentary committees on holding open hearings and developing and overseeing the implementation of legislation. NDI also conducted a mid-term assessment in collaboration with party leaders in 1997 and new member orientation for the parliament that was seated in early 2000. In 1999, NDI parliamentary trainer Johan Hamels worked with parliamentary staff to develop a workplan for the Foreign Relations Assistance Council, the body responsible for coordinating assistance to parliament from foreign donors. It is a measure of NDI's relationship with the parliament that its speaker, Zurab Zhvania, recently credited NDI with being part of every major reform in Georgia during the last five years.

Objectives

- Improve the parliament's ability to shape and oversee legislation;
- Promote the development of cohesive factions that are tied to political party structures.
- Encourage parliamentarians to be more accountable to constituents
- Assist the parliament to develop open and transparent procedures

Activities

Development of Legislation

During the reporting period, NDI worked with the parliament in the development of new legislation on local government, election administration, curtailing corruption and regulation of the media and of lobbyists' activities.

In 1997, NDI met with committee chairmen and other MPs repeatedly to discuss draft local government legislation. NDI encouraged the committee leadership to incorporate into the draft provisions amendments allowing maximum local autonomy. With MPs and draft local government legislation, NDI focused on ways of building support for provisions to allow the election of local officials.

NDI collaborated with the American Bar Association Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) and the Open Society Institute-Georgia (OSIG) in 1997 on two seminars on the challenges of transforming state television to independently controlled public television. NDI followed up on these seminars with a conference on electronic mass media. The participants, representing both majority and opposition factions, agreed to increase the dissemination of state information, to define what information should be classified better and to mandate more financial disclosure by media companies. These provisions were incorporated into amendments to the law on media and into the new Administrative Code approved by the Parliament in 1999.

NDI assisted the parliament in developing legislation regulating the activities of lobbyists by providing information on U.S. and other countries' lobbying regulations at a seminar for legislative, executive and business officials. The Institute also helped the Anti-Corruption Committee to draft a bill on lobbying that was passed by the parliament in 1998. NDI continued to support the development of anti-corruption initiatives by organizing a meeting for a group of Georgian delegates visiting the U.S. to meet with experts from the Office of Government Ethics in February 1999 to discuss draft conflict of interest legislation.

Throughout the reporting period, NDI consulted with members and staff of the Georgian Parliament on a number of election law reform issues, including amendments to the parliamentary election law. In January 1999, NDI hosted a three-day conference on potential revisions to the election law that was attended by members of parliament, and of the Central Election Commission, and representatives of political parties and NGOs.

The Institute made it a priority during all consultations to promote the parliament's inclusion of NGOs, the media and the public in the legislative process through holding public hearings, issuing press statements, and inviting experts to comment on laws.

Strengthening Oversight

In 1998, NDI worked with the Majority Leader to develop a workplan to improve the parliament's oversight function. The workplan detailed steps to improve committee and public hearings and "question hour," during which time government ministers must respond to MPs' questions. The workplan also recommended expanded powers be given to the parliament's Control Chamber, a department that collects financial information from ministries on how funds allocated by the parliament are spent.

NDI provided comments on a draft resolution that explicitly outlined the parliament's oversight powers and worked with committees to implement these new powers in hearings. In 1998, NDI also sent a group of five government and opposition legislators and staff to the U.S. from to learn how American legislatures approach their oversight responsibilities. In response to continued interest in the topic, NDI, in January 2000, organized a conference on oversight for the new parliamentary leadership.

Beginning in 1998, NDI devoted particular attention to oversight of the military. Initially attempting to promote dialogue between the parliamentary and military leadership, NDI sponsored two conferences attended by leading MPs, officials of the security ministries and international experts in civil-military relations. NDI followed this with a panel discussion on specific aspects of parliamentary oversight over the defense budget at which former Defense Minister of Argentina Oscar Camillion shared his country's experience.

In 1999, NDI continued to build on its relationship with the Defense Committee, advising committee leadership on conducting public hearings, overseeing the budget and developing a dialogue between the military and civilians. NDI's in-house civil-military expert visited in July to assist with this training and to help assess the need for further NDI work on oversight of the Defense Ministry and coordination with the International Security Advisory Board (ISAB).

Improving Faction Cohesion and Party-Faction Ties

In 1997, NDI helped the CUG organize a "Faction Day" to discuss plans and priorities for the fall legislative term. The following year, NDI, at the request of Speaker Zurab Zhvania, organized a conference for the faction on strategic planning for the fall local government elections. NDI subsequently consulted with party leadership on coordinating a joint faction-party media strategy. The Institute also met with People's Party faction leaders to review strategy for the party and faction in local government elections.

Prior to 1999 parliamentary elections, NDI trainers held workshops for the CUG, PP and Socialist factions on using the factions' legislative and voting records and the power of incumbency to support their members' re-election bids.

Mid-Term Evaluation

At Speaker Zhvania's request, NDI organized an evaluation of the parliament's effectiveness, mid-way through its term in January 1998. More than 40 members of the parliamentary leadership gathered to assess the effectiveness of the parliament's rules and procedures; to review the authority and functions of the committees and factions; and to discuss ways of improving the parliament's oversight function. NDI experts for the program included Dale Campbell Savours, a Labour Party MP from Great Britain and Elliot Levitas, a former U.S. Congressman.

Outreach to Women

To encourage greater women's participation in the political process, NDI conducted a series of consultations with the Women's Caucus in parliament and a meeting for the Women's Caucus and more than 30 women leaders from the NGO community in 1998. Participants adopted a series of initiatives for the Women's Caucus and NGOs to heighten awareness in the parliament and the public of the concerns of Georgian women.

New Member Orientation

NDI helped to facilitate the transition to a new parliament in January 2000 with orientation seminars for the leadership and new members. NDI held separate new member orientation seminars for the CUG Faction and minority members. International trainers focused on the functions and responsibilities of an MP, roles of committees and factions and the relations between factions and their party. In 2000, NDI also completed and helped to distribute, in collaboration with Parliamentary Research Service, a comprehensive manual on the structure and function of the Georgian parliament.

NDI's activities with the Georgian Parliament corresponded to USAID Intermediate Result (IR) 2.1.1 to "improve availability of access to information;" IR 2.1.3 to "increase public confidence in citizens' ability to affect change;" and 2.1.4 to "increase public confidence in the political process."

Evaluation

Have committees shown leadership in developing and passing laws? Have committees demonstrated an ability to shape, implement and/or oversee legislation?

Several committees with which NDI has worked, notably the Legal, Defense and Budget committees have successfully developed legislation. At the initiative of the Legal Committee, the Parliament passed an administrative code designed to regulate civil and

administrative procedures at all levels of the Georgian government. It includes Georgia's first Freedom of Information Act, giving citizens access to information on the workings of their government. The Anti-Corruption Commission drafted a bill on lobbying based on information gathered at an April 1998, NDI-ABA/CEELI seminar on the contents of bills regulating lobbying activities. The parliament enacted this legislation in 1998.

According to Nino Burjanadze, Chair of the Legal Committee, NDI's January 1999 conference on election law played a key role in passage of amendments to the law that year. Among the amendments reviewed at the conference were creation of a smaller Central Election Committee, changes to the procedure for appointment to the Central Election Committee, establishment of the rights and independence of election commission members, creation of mechanisms for financing and publicizing the election process, and an increase in the threshold for parties' representation in the parliament.

NDI has put particular emphasis on strengthening committees' oversight role, and has observed some noteworthy changes. Based on recommendations generated during the 1997 -1998 mid-term evaluation, the parliamentary leadership improved its "question hour," expanded the powers of the Control Chamber to enable it to gather more information from ministries, and began utilizing committee hearings for oversight purposes. Throughout the period, the Parliament has also increasingly exercised its right to approve ministerial candidates nominated by the executive. Committees have begun to play a more significant role in terms of selecting and approving candidates, holding meetings to examine each candidate more closely.

In summer 1998, the Parliamentary Anti-Corruption Commission, the Committee on the Economy, and the Committee on Legal Affairs jointly organized public hearings on alleged violations of the law on conflict of interest by a former Minister of Communications. This was the first time that the Georgian government had investigated allegations of corruption at the ministerial level, and that the investigation was begun at the behest of parliament. Moreover, by involving ordinary citizens, NGOs and the media in this process, the parliament has raised awareness of its oversight duties. Parliament's increased ability to focus public attention on government activities parliament may have contributed to the changes in the cabinet in late July 1998.

NDI's support for greater civilian oversight of the military has met with considerable enthusiasm both in the parliament and the Defense Ministry. The Defense Minister and President Shevardnadze both had expressed strong support for NDI's continued efforts in this sensitive area to NDI President Ken Wollack during his visit to Tbilisi in late June 1998. According to Niko Nikolishvili, advisor to the Parliamentary Defense Committee, which is charged with oversight of Defense Ministry expenditures, the October 1998 NDI conference on defense budget procedures greatly improved relations between the Committee and the Ministry. For example, immediately following the conference the Defense Ministry submitted a budget, newly organized by line item and unit, to the Parliamentary Defense Committee.

Are factions a forum for the discussion of policy and legislative issues? Are the factions cohesive, and do they have mechanisms for enforcing party discipline or resolving conflicts among members? Are factions' leadership able to mobilize members to support policy issues? Have factions established newsletters, held regular meetings or undertaken other activities to improve communication and coordination within the faction?

The first two years of the 1995-1999 parliamentary term saw a number of changes in faction composition. In the latter half of the term factions stabilized and their memberships coalesced. The factions with which NDI worked (CUG, NDP, and the People's Party) improved their internal communications and established regular meetings to review pending legislation and reach an internal consensus before each week's parliamentary session. The NDP and People's Party faction members usually voted together on important issues, as did the CUG, to a slightly lesser extent.

The formation of the majority and minority coalitions after the October 31, 1999 elections changed the structure of the new parliament. The minority coalition has remained united to date, while the majority coalition has proved to be less stable. The defection of one of the factions in the majority coalition (Abkhazeti), and further lack of unity in the leading faction of the majority during the budget approval process, recently led faction leaders to take steps to improve internal discipline.

In May 2000, faction Chair Misha Saakashvili proposed the introduction of a three star system for evaluating and classifying bills and resolutions. Hungarian MP Matyas Eorsi originally introduced this three-star system at the March NDI conference for new CUG MPs. According to this system, members are obliged to vote with the faction on three-star bills, are encouraged to vote with the faction on two-star bills, and can vote as they wish on one-star bills. This process includes in-depth discussions on upcoming bills in faction meetings and a procedure for developing consensus in the faction.

The minority coalition has also developed a set of rules for the coordination of the coalition members (five factions) and decision-making. Methods for improving coordination between the factions with different ideology and political background were also discussed at the NDI conference for the minority in June 2000.

Although the factions have not established regular newsletters, there were some attempts in the 1995-1999 parliament to launch them. Almost all parties in the former and current parliament hold regular faction meetings and in the new parliament, the minority and majority coalitions also meet. These gatherings are held on Mondays, before the start of the plenary session in order to discuss issues on the agenda during the week.

Some of the factions have also adopted a practice of holding "faction days," a retreat for party members suggested in NDI trainings, between the spring and fall sessions. The CUG, for example, gathered this summer for a few days to discuss the major issues upcoming for the fall session.

Have parliamentarians from single-mandate districts, in particular, adopted practices of constituent servicing? Do parliamentarians travel to their regions and otherwise maintain relations with voters?

NDI has preliminarily noted an increase in interest in constituency work among single mandate parliamentarians in the new parliament that began in 2000. Some of the MPs have opened constituency offices in their districts and have displayed new interest in serving their regions. For example, in spring 2000, the open sitting of the “Majoritarian” faction included discussions with a number of ministers or deputy ministers. Questioning focused on problems that had arisen in the MPs districts or regions.

An election law that does not require MPs to run from the districts in which they live continues to impede efforts to encourage accountability to constituents. Many Members from single mandate districts in 1995-1999 simply opted to run from different districts in 1999 rather than face their constituents from the previous term.

Has Parliament adopted measures or policies that open up and encourage public access to the institution? Have parliamentary committees taken steps to explain their legislative decisions to the public or invite the public to participate in committee debates?

In June 1998, NDI assisted the Agriculture Committee to organize the first parliamentary hearings held outside of Tbilisi. Local officials, citizens and NGO representatives testified at the hearing on the impact of land privatization. In 1999, the Defense Committee began holding regular public hearings approximately every two weeks on new legislation to restructure the Georgian military and to monitor the activities of various law enforcement agencies. The Committee also encouraged the active involvement of NGOs as advocates on issues ranging from the legal rights of conscripts to Georgia's framework for national security.

NDI stressed the importance of public hearings and methods for involving NGOs and other interested parties at its January 2000 conference for the parliamentary leadership, in new member orientation and consultations with new committee chairs. Committees in the new, current parliament have demonstrated greater interest in public hearings. At the beginning of the new term, several committees organized hearings on the draft budget and to consider candidates for ministerial posts. These hearings were well attended by MPs from other committees, media and NGOs.

Have members of the parliament's staff improved their ability to provide legislative or issue-related research, administrative assistance or constituent support to parliamentarians?

In preparation for the new parliamentary term that began in 2000, NDI helped parliamentary staff draft a manual for MPs and to prepare an arrival package. At the beginning of the new parliament, the staff distributed the arrival package, which included

copies of the Constitution, Rules of Procedure, and major organic laws. Changes in the Rules and structure of the parliament delayed the printing of the manual until June 2000. Unfortunately, in this parliament, budget constraints resulted in the downsizing of the staff and prompted some of the professional and well-trained staffers to look for other job opportunities

B. Civic Development

In 1995, drawing on its experience with domestic election observing worldwide, NDI helped a group of Georgian civic activists create the Fair Elections Society, (subsequently renamed the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) to monitor the presidential and parliamentary polls that year. With NDI's support, ISFED has continued to grow and to expand its monitoring capability, placing non-partisan volunteer observers in nearly 100% of precincts during Georgia's 1999 parliamentary elections. Between elections, ISFED has also organized town hall meetings and established local citizen advisory committees in 21 cities across Georgia, winning recognition and respect among political parties and the media. The organization is regularly invited by parliamentary committees to comment on legislation and by the media to present its views on public policy issues.

NDI's work in the civic sector has contributed to a new receptivity within the Georgian government toward non-governmental organizations. In 1997, NDI facilitated a meeting of representatives of the State Chancellery and leading Georgian NGOs, which resulted in the creation of the NGO Advisory Committee to the Chancellery. In 1999, NDI began to assist the Georgian Women's Network, a coalition of women's groups, to lobby the political parties to support their issues.

Objectives:

- Improve ISFED's capacity for election-monitoring and related activities.
- Promote ISFED's long-term sustainability through organizational development
- Increase citizen participation in civic life through advocacy and public education

Activities

With ISFED

In this period, NDI assisted ISFED with three kinds of programs: to effectively monitor the three nationwide elections; to promote citizen participation in local policymaking and to introduce notions of accountability and relationships with NGOs to newly elected local councils. In 2000, to mark five years' of involvement with ISFED, NDI conducted a comprehensive assessment of its efforts to provide technical assistance to the organization.

Election Monitoring

In 1998, ISFED began to identify regions where it needed to bolster its membership in preparation for a succession of elections in 1998, 1999 and 2000. It targeted the Kutaisi, Gori, Telavi and Zugdidi regions, where ISFED had established regional offices in 1997. In 1999, ISFED continued the volunteer recruitment drive in 1998, particularly in Racha Lechkhumi, Mtskheta Mianeti, Samkha Javakheti and Ajara. In addition to the three nationwide elections held during this period, in May and June 1998, ISFED monitored two rounds of parliamentary by-elections in Lagodekhi. The Central Election Commission cited ISFED's statement in declaring the first round of elections invalid.

For each election, ISFED produced instruction manuals and organized hundreds of trainings for monitors, employing a "train the trainers" system. Experienced leaders in the organization prepared about 140 trainers, usually district or rayon level coordinators, who in turn trained the precinct monitors. ISFED also trained monitors from 13 parties in 11 regions in 1999.

In the 1998 pre-election period, ISFED undertook a public education campaign to prepare voters for the new institution of local councils. At more than 50 public meetings in Baghdati, Tkhaltsubo, Tkhibuli, Zestaphoni, Telavi, Gurjani, Gori, Kaspi and Kutaisi, ISFED emphasized the importance of local councils in providing new opportunities for citizens' voices to be heard.

ISFED also organized candidate debates in the regions of Tbilisi, Ajara, Kakheti, Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Imereti, Samegrelo, and Samskhe-Javakheti in 1998. Local ISFED chapters and Citizens' Advisory Committees organized these debates, recruited candidates to participate and publicized the events. ISFED participated in two televised public meetings and debates organized in cooperation with Internews, IFES, NDI, and IRI in Batumi, Gori and Telavi.

In the period preceding the parliamentary elections in 1999, ISFED monitored the activities of the Central Election Commission. The organization sought to subject Central Election Committee workings to greater transparency after noting a pattern of last minute changes on important aspects of election administration. ISFED issued statements on the Central Election Committees performance and appeared on television and radio frequently to discuss election-related events. For example, following the Central Election Committee's refusal to make available signature lists of initiative groups that nominated district election commission members, ISFED conducted a press conference and threatened to take the matter to the Constitutional Court.

Prior to every election, ISFED conducted a public education campaign in its own and other media on voting procedures. Public education materials for the 1998 elections also covered the roles of new local councils. In 1998, ISFED leaders produced public service announcements for television, and broadcast information through the Tbilisi Metro's public address system; in 1999, it aired two voter education programs. In all three years ISFED leaders appeared on television numerous times before the election and distributed a special election edition of its regular newsletter "Civil Society." In 1999, "Civil

Society” was the only publication distributed prior to parliamentary elections that contained parliamentarians’ voting records.

ISFED held press conferences following each election, to review its findings and to make preliminary recommendations. In 1998, the organization used the opportunity to call for changes in the law to facilitate better election administration. ISFED subsequently organized an NGO roundtable on election law reform and testified in parliament on ways to increase transparency and reduce fraud. In addition to its initial press conference, ISFED followed the adjudication of cases involving disputed races in 1999 and issued an interim statement within one month of the elections. After the 2000 presidential elections, ISFED’s publication of its initial and interim reports led to a live debate between ISFED’s Executive Director and a member of the Central Election Commission on the results of the presidential elections.

Promoting citizen participation

In 1997, a non-elections year, ISFED focused on bringing citizens into policymaking at the local level. ISFED conducted 18 "dialogue meetings" bringing together appointed local officials and members of parliament with citizens in small and medium sized towns throughout Georgia. After each meeting, ISFED supervised the formation of a Citizens’ Advisory Committee, a voluntary citizens’ group set up to meet periodically with local officials to discuss community problems

In 1998 and 1999, ISFED continued to help its Citizens' Advisory Committees link the residents of a community and their appointed local officials. ISFED worked with the Citizens' Advisory Committees in Gori and Telavi to conduct the first-ever public hearings on local budgets in Georgia. Citizens' Advisory Committees also served as interlocutors between local NGOs and officials, helping to organize meetings between them.

ISFED also helped Citizens' Advisory Committees to conduct more difficult and sophisticated activities, involve more people and use of the media. For example, in February 2000, the Zestaponi Citizens' Advisory Committee organized a public meeting on the privatization of the local manganese factory, which was attended by more than six hundred people. The Citizens' Advisory Committee then submitted its recommendations along with footage of the meeting to the popular television program "60 Minutes," which aired a one-hour program on the issue

ISFED has also been working with student NGOs. In June 2000, ISFED, together with Liberty Institute and the State University Student Self-Government Association, organized the first public meeting between a student association and university administrators. Several Georgian NGOs as well as six members of parliament attended the meeting. The Association was established with the assistance of ISFED and Liberty Institute in April 2000. Its primary goals are to advocate on behalf of university students for representation on the University Council (an administrative body), for greater rights in

students selection of professors and elective courses and for increased budget transparency.

Promoting accountability in new local councils

Following the 1998 elections, ISFED, with the support of the Soros Foundation, helped to design a manual for the thousands of new local government officials. The manual was designed to introduce council members to basic democratic governance, the structure and functions of different levels of Georgian government, and how they interrelate. From January to March 1999, ISFED distributed its local government manual to thousands of new council members. ISFED also published a compilation of laws relevant to local government, and distributed two copies to each of the 1000 councils. The distribution of these materials helped ISFED branches establish relations with newly elected local council members.

This contributed to helping ISFED organize 43 town hall meetings attended by more than 4000 citizens in cities and towns throughout Georgia in 1999. Meetings brought together newly elected council members, local (rayon level) executives, Citizens' Advisory Committee members and citizens to address local problems and the relationship between the local executives and councils.

ISFED also launched a media campaign to inform the public on the role of local councils. By June 1999, ISFED representatives had produced more than 20 radio and television appearances and published more than 50 newspaper articles on councils' legal powers and responsibilities, emphasizing how citizens could approach local councils and interact with this new level of government.

NDI's Activities with Other NGOs

In 1997 and 1998, NDI worked to establish a standing body that would give NGOs a greater voice inside the government. At a meeting organized by NDI in October 1997, State Chancellery officials and NGO leaders formed a steering committee to discuss cooperation and to develop policy positions on topics of mutual concern. Throughout the spring of 1998, NDI continued to consult with these NGOs and the chancellery, leading, in July, to the creation of the NGO Advisory Council within the State Chancellery. The Council began to hold monthly meetings to inform NGO representatives of projects under consideration and seek their input. NDI continued to work with NGOs and the Council to develop a mechanism for collaboration on legislative proposals.

NDI also continued to assist other NGOs, particularly women's organizations, with organizational development and advocacy training. In September 1998, NDI organized a training session in September in cooperation with the UNDP. Sixty national coordinators of the NGO "Women in Development" worked with NDI trainers on strategies for increasing women's participation in the November elections, putting women's issues on the political agenda, and recruiting women as candidates.

In July 1999, NDI held a roundtable on women in politics that helped to produce the Georgian Women's Network, a coalition of 15 women's organizations interested in promoting women's political participation. Following the roundtable, civic trainer Mark Mullen and party trainer Joe Taggart met with members of the Network to help them design and publicize a questionnaire for the parties clarifying their positions on issues relating to women's political and economic status. The Georgian Women's Network announced the distribution of the questionnaire to all parties at a press conference in September, and informed the public of the parties' responses at a second press conference two weeks before the elections.

Assessment of ISFED

After five years of assisting ISFED, NDI decided to conduct a formal assessment of both the organization itself and NDI's technical assistance to it. Senior NDI Program Officer Katie Fox and former NDI - Civic Trainer Michael Marshall sought to determine how NDI could better assist ISFED, particularly in becoming sustainable over the long-term as well as to develop stronger programs to increase citizen participation and to promote government transparency in addition to election monitoring. Based on the assessment, NDI drafted a set of recommendations which included: increasing resources for district level activity with local government; developing a more aggressive program of press outreach; creating a process for involving the regions or districts in planning national programs; and creating plans for organizational development as well as program development. NDI will continue to work with ISFED on implementing the recommendations.

NDI's civic program activities corresponded to USAID IR 2.1.1 to "improve availability of access to information" and IR 2.1.3 to "increase public confidence in citizens' ability to affect change."

Evaluation

Has there been an increase in citizen participation in NDI's partner organization, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), or other nongovernmental, nonpartisan organizations with which NDI works? Are a greater number of citizens participating in voting, election monitoring, representative government decision-making, or civic organizing and advocacy? Was ISFED or other organizations with which NDI works instrumental in increasing and improving citizen participation?

In the 1999 parliamentary elections, ISFED almost doubled the number of non-partisan election monitors it fielded in 1995, from 1300 to 2400. Pre-election public meetings and candidate debates organized by ISFED in 1998 allowed the organization to reach over 4,000 citizens directly. These events brought the public into the political process with interactive discussions ranging from broad concepts such as local government and democracy to community-specific issues and problems. For many voters, ISFED-

sponsored debates were a unique opportunity to meet their potential representatives face to face.

ISFED's ability to involve people in the political process was also demonstrated by the success of programs like the public hearings on the local budget organized by the Citizens' Advisory Committees in Gori and Telavi in early 1999. Previously, local budgets were secret and expenditures were largely at the discretion of appointed local officials. In addition, Citizens' Advisory Committees in Khoi, Khashuri, Borjomi, Zestaponi and Kutaisi attracted 200-500 citizens to meetings with elected council members and appointed rayon and district officials. The meetings addressed budgets and related issues including privatization, corruption, unpaid salaries and pensions, and legislative changes that would empower elected local officials, enabling them to better respond to voters' needs.

For most citizens, this was their first experience meeting government representatives. High levels of attendance, more than 50 percent of council members and local executives, demonstrated the recognition and respect ISFED has cultivated in the regions. Following the meetings, ISFED and local Citizens' Advisory Committees organizers received dozens of calls from citizens interested in becoming active in Citizens' Advisory Committee activities.

Other Citizens' Advisory Committees have helped citizens to advocate for better public services or more transparency. Citizens' Advisory Committees in Tbilisi and Gori persuaded local councils to fix roads and to rebuild apartments destroyed by flood. The Telavi and Zestaphoni Citizens' Advisory Committees helped to get investigation opened into industry privatizations, which involved numerous allegations of corruption including misuse of local budget funds. In Zestaphoni, the Citizens' Advisory Committee also succeeded to getting back wages paid and to the cancellation of an agreement to sell factory equipment for scrap. Citizens' Advisory Committees in the Imereti region helped local grape and silk growers contact the mayor to complain of non-payment for the crops they had delivered to government-owned factories. The mayor agreed to the Citizens' Advisory Committee-proposed compromise of a written contract and partial payment to the farmers.

At the national level, ISFED participated in debates over new local government laws in 1997 and election laws in 1999. ISFED leaders testified at parliamentary hearings on the election law and submitted recommendations. Parliament adopted one of these a requirement that voter lists be posted in polling places 30 days before the elections.

Has ISFED demonstrated a capacity to sustain itself and its efforts to engage citizens in democracy building? How? (Fundraising, membership building, developing regional branches, improved internal organization and communication, charter and message development, and registration).

Over the past three years, ISFED worked at expanding its membership in both population centers and more isolated parts of Georgia, which traditionally have had difficulty receiving public information or support. The organization now has 2400 members as opposed to about 800 in 1996. ISFED has members in all but three rayons (excluding Abkhazia) and chapters in all but the most remote and mountainous parts of Georgia.

To respond to the needs of a growing organization, ISFED, in this period, experimented with, and then discontinued, a system of regional offices. Closure of the regional offices freed money for programs at the local level. Instead, ISFED has created two Tbilisi-based community organizer positions, each with responsibility for half the country.

Improvements to internal organization and communication structures continue to be debated within ISFED and between ISFED and NDI, most recently following NDI's assessment of ISFED in June 2000.

In this period, ISFED has expanded its program beyond elections related work, and broadened its message accordingly. An initial step was ISFED's decision at its 1997 National Assembly to call itself the International Society for Fair Elections *and Democracy*, rather than just for Fair Elections. Following 1999 revisions, ISFED's charter cites as ISFED's objectives civic education and increased citizen participation, in addition to ensuring fair elections. In accordance with this wider mandate, ISFED has, over the past three years: created 21 Citizens' Advisory Committees to bring together citizens and local government; involved activists in nationwide monitoring of public access to information and implementation of new passport laws; in concert with students' NGOs, set up student parliaments and organized lectures on the principles of democratic governance for students; and regularly circulated a newsletter to 5,000. The newsletter contains information on pending legislation, the activities of ISFED, other NGOs, and democratic practices.

Are civic organizations with which NDI has worked building their membership bases, increasing their public visibility, raising resources, and advocating public issues to government bodies? Are these organizations becoming greater in number, size, strength, and influence in the public sphere?

In 1998, NDI's consultations with government and NGO leaders contributed to President Shevardnadze's establishment of the NGO Advisory Council to the Chancellery. Through this Council, NGOs gained a forum for regularly communicating their views to policymakers. Beginning in 1999, the Advisory Council was actively involved in debates on policy issues including election law revisions, police oversight, and issues related to internally displaced persons. One important contribution of the Council to an open legislative process has been the provision to NGO representatives of a list of all pending legislation initiated within the Chancellery. A government fund to support NGOs was created in September 1999, based upon a suggestion at a Council meeting.

In December 1999, the Council was combined with the newly created public relations department under the state minister within the Chancellery. Prior to this, the Council was

subordinate to the President's Chief-of-Staff and had no official staff. While this was first viewed as a demonstration of new commitment to the Council, following the appointment of the new state minister the Council was disbanded. Currently discussions are underway to form a new Council.

NDI also helped in 1999 to create the Georgian Women's Network, a group of 15 women's organizations dedicated to raising the profile of women's issues. NDI helped them design a questionnaire to elicit parties' positions on their issues and to publicize the results.

C. Political Party Development

NDI's political party work in Georgia is aimed at strengthening the organizational abilities of the country's fledgling democratic parties, through training at regional as well as national levels for party leaders, campaign managers and candidates. The emphasis on developing national democratic parties from the grassroots remains central to NDI's programming with Georgian political parties.

During the period of this agreement, NDI conducted political party training, chiefly with the following parties:

- **Citizen's Union of Georgia (CUG).** Founded in 1993, the CUG is a center-left coalition of political groups supporting President Eduard Shevardnadze.
- **National Democratic Party (NDP).** One of the oldest parties in Georgia (revived in 1992), the NDP is a center-right opposition party. The party was damaged by a split in 1996 and failed to win any seats in the 1999 elections.
- **People's Party.** Formed in 1996 from NDP activists, the People's Party also failed to win seats in the 1999 elections and is now struggling to develop a coherent ideology to distinguish it from other centrist parties.

In 1997 and 1998, NDI worked on building national and regional organizations with the three parties listed above and briefly with the Green Party, the Socialist Party, and the Union of Georgian Traditionalists.

During the period of this agreement, Georgia held three national elections: local councils elections in November 1998, parliamentary elections in October/November 1999, and presidential elections in April 2000. The National Democratic Party, the People's Party and the Socialist Party all performed well in the 1998 local elections, each winning sizable pockets of votes in different regions. In 1999, NDI's work focused on helping parties prepare for parliamentary elections held in the fall of that year. NDI staff noted that in contrast to the 1995 parliamentary elections cycle, parties had developed written election strategies that included: targeting goals for key districts and groups of voters;

establishing voter file databases; and using voter contact techniques, such as door-to-door canvassing.

For two of NDI's main party partners, these improvements and the incremental gains in votes they might have generated were offset by leaders' misjudgements and increased polarization of the electorate. During the preparations for the 1999 election, People's Party leader Mamuka Giorgadze engaged in serious negotiations aimed at building a coalition with Georgia's Revival. Revival, led by Adjara secessionist leader Aslan Abashidze, is Georgia's second largest party. Although the People's Party ultimately decided not to join in a coalition with Revival, its credibility with democratic voters was severely damaged. Additional potential PP and NDP supporters, frightened by the growth of Revival heeded the CUG's warning against risking their votes on smaller democratic parties that might not clear the seven percent threshold for representation in parliament. They gave the CUG an absolute majority in parliament while the NDP and PP did not garner the seven percent required for a share of the party list seats.

Objectives

- Improve coordination and communication within parties, including inclusion of regional leaders in decision-making.
- Enable parties to plan for and more effectively compete in elections.

Activities

With Citizen's Union of Georgia

NDI consulted with the national leadership throughout the period on strategic planning, polling, developing team communication, and structuring the operations and staffing the national campaign headquarters. Prior to local government elections, these meetings with national leaders expanded into workshops for regional campaign managers in July 1998. Workshops covered structuring the operations of regional party headquarters and campaign offices, with the goal of better communicating its message to voters and increasing voter contact through door-to-door campaigning. In 1999, trainers emphasized the importance of identifying and addressing local concerns, developing a telephone "hotline" to enable voters to speak with candidates, keeping the campaign fresh by periodically releasing new themes, developing press packets and producing campaign informational booklets with job descriptions for campaign organizers and volunteers. At a seminar in spring 1998, NDI trained activists to be trainers throughout the CUG party structure, who then trained additional trainers.

As the majority party, CUG is subject to frequent challenges in the media by its rivals. NDI sent Tim Russo, NDI political party trainer, in the fall 1997 and Marvin Fast, press secretary for U.S. Senator Chris Dodd to Tbilisi in February 1998 to advise the CUG on developing quick-response media strategies and generally improving the party's press

relations. NDI also facilitated the reorganization of the CUG press office and presented the CUG leadership with other press-related recommendations.

In preparation for 1999 parliamentary elections at the CUG's request, an international expert recruited by NDI spent two weeks with campaign staff in the CUG headquarters to observe the daily activities and to evaluate the day-to-day operations and organizational structure of the CUG. Between these visits, NDI's political party trainer conducted follow-up meetings with the party, reviewed campaign developments, and provided additional training and assistance as requested by the party. Young CUG regional branches also worked with NDI to strengthen coordination between the youth branch and party leaders, to involve youth during and between election campaigns and to provide opportunities for youth in public service.

With the National Democratic Party/National Democratic Alliance

In 1997 and 1998, NDI focused on helping the NDP re-organize following its split with the People's Party in 1996. The NDP joined the Republican and Entrepreneurs' parties to form the National Democratic Alliance in May 1999. NDI subsequently advised the NDP on coalition building and maintenance as well as helping them to prepare for the 1999 parliamentary elections

In 1998, NDI emphasized the upcoming local elections as a means to help the NDP's national leadership repair the party's fractured infrastructure and consolidate its membership. Throughout the spring of that year, NDI consulted with the national leadership on ways to improve party communication and cohesion. On May 1-2, NDI conducted a seminar for 45 regional and national leaders of the NDP, aimed at helping the party to involve its grassroots base in the local election campaign. The Institute also provided training to NDP youth organizers on basic campaign techniques with an emphasis on engaging the public in campaign activities and conducted "train the trainer" workshops for party activists.

Additional campaign seminars in 1999 addressed contacting voters, canvassing door-to-door and creating a database of canvassing results. Then, NDP regional chapter leaders reported on the techniques used and results of the door-to-door survey conducted in Georgia's six largest cities with other regional leaders. NDI provided a critique of this effort and suggestions for improvement.

With the formation of the National Democratic Party-led National Democratic Alliance in the spring 1999, NDI focused on helping the party integrate new political partners. An international trainer stressed the importance of developing a unified message and concrete image of the National Democratic Alliance to present to the public. Training also sought to redirect the Alliance's strategy from a campaign based on criticism of opponents to a more focused approach with a consistent message and targeted voters. NDI's expert provided candidates with NDI's campaign manual and spoke on conducting research,

setting goals, targeting voters, developing a message, and contacting voters. Demand for these seminars was so great that NDI twice repeated this training.

With the People's Party

The People's Party is a 1996 offshoot from the NDP. With this relatively new party, NDI emphasized the basics of campaign planning and voter contact in 1997 and 1998. In early 1998, the party's national leadership identified 20 activists to serve as local election campaign trainers and to work with local and regional party activists throughout Georgia. NDI intensively trained these activists on topics such as message development, media relations, fundraising, targeting and establishing a campaign headquarters. NDI then assisted these activists in training more than one hundred activists for subsequent workshops for local party activists throughout Georgia.

In fall 1998, seminars in Kutaisi, Telavi, Guria, Gori and Tbilisi for People's Party candidates and campaign organizers helped candidates to learn to communicate their message effectively to voters. They featured mock candidate forums, in which candidates practiced their skills and received feedback from their colleagues.

To learn from the local government election, a post-election assessment seminar reviewed the party's activities and performance. Based on these discussions, NDI made several recommendations to the party leadership on methods to improve the party's name recognition and voter contact. NDI international trainers then met with PP leaders to discuss their strategy, in part based on these recommendations, to support both majoritarian and party list candidates in parliamentary elections. Trainers critiqued their plans and suggested time-lines for campaign activities, emphasizing door-to-door campaigning and town hall meetings to bring voters and candidates together. In Tbilisi, the trainers met with the national leadership to discuss the party's need to develop a single message, providing advice and examples to help the party in this task.

With Other Parties

NDI also worked with the Socialist Party and the Union of Georgian Traditionalists to a lesser extent. Although both parties failed to win seats under the proportional system in the 1995-1999 parliament, they retained distinct identities and sizeable followings. Consultations in 1998 focused on overcoming their organizational disadvantages vis-à-vis the larger, better-known political parties in the upcoming local government elections. Particular attention was given to encouraging the parties to target their efforts to regions where the parties have relative strength. Two seminars with the Socialist Party's national, regional and youth chapter leadership addressed general campaign strategy: message development, direct voter contact methods and relations between the national and regional chapters.

With All Parties

To compliment training, NDI produced a Georgian-language manual on party activism and campaign training that was distributed to over 20,000 party activists from the CUG, NDP, PP, Socialists and Traditionalists in 1998. The manual discussed organizing regional campaign headquarters, recruiting and working with volunteers, targeting and approaching voters, designing campaign literature, and developing and communicating the party's message.

Together with ISFED, NDI also organized election monitor training for party proxies from thirteen parties in eleven cities before the local and parliamentary elections. Proxies were trained how to observe elections and to record possible violations on Election Day. Participants also received monitoring materials prepared by IFES, NDI and ISFED.

Prior to the 1998 elections, the CUG, NDP, PP, Socialists and Traditionalists consulted with NDI to evaluate campaign operations and the incorporation of seminar recommendations. Following the local government elections, NDI organized post-election evaluation seminars for the CUG, NDP, PP, Socialists and Greens. The seminars were designed to help the chairs of the regional party organizations to develop accurate post-election analyses of campaign efforts on a precinct, regional and national level.

With Outreach to Women

In 1999, NDI hosted a roundtable with political parties, NGOs and businesses to discuss methods for increasing women's involvement in political parties and the political process in Georgia. At NDI's suggestion, the CUG, NDA, PP, Socialists, Greens and Revival all designated an individual to conduct outreach to women voters and to promote women's advancement within the parties. The 1999 round-table led to the creation of the Georgian Women's Network, a coalition of NGOs, political activists and businesswomen interested in promoting issues of interest to women and women's participation in political life.

NDI's political party activities corresponded to IR 2.1.3 to "increase public confidence in citizens' ability to affect change" and 2.1.4 to "increase public confidence in the political process."

Evaluation

Have parties adopted policies or mechanisms to improve communication, coordination and consistency throughout the party hierarchy? Have political party leaders improved their ability to convey a coherent conception of the party and organizational priorities to members? Has communication within the parties improved?

In this grant period, each of the major parties with which NDI worked applied the Institute's recommendations to improve coordination and consistency of message throughout the party. The Citizen's Union of Georgia implemented NDI's suggestions to create information packets containing campaign calendars, roles and responsibilities, names and contact information, campaign message and key points, for distribution to

regional headquarters staff and majoritarian candidates. At NDI's suggestion the Citizen's Union of Georgia and People's Party both used regional coordinators to implement a coordinated campaign strategy throughout the regions. Regional coordinators also helped link strategies to elect single-mandate and party list candidates. Such coordinated efforts with the regions are weaker in non-election periods and the parties need further assistance and training in maintaining these practices consistently.

Message development of coherent party concepts is an ongoing problem for all of NDI's party partners. Despite extensive training on this topic, parties have largely relied on the Soviet-era practice of long-winded, general speeches, which do not always intersect with voters' concerns or generate interest in the political process

Have parties intensified their activities in the regions? Have regional organizations increased their membership base? Do regional organizations demonstrate awareness of and conformity with general party objectives? Do they participate actively in the development of party platforms?

In 1998, parties intensified their activities in the regions, relative to the 1995 parliamentary election cycle. NDI noticed that local elections were a forceful demonstration of the value of recruiting talent in the regions faced with the need to recruit candidates at the local level, party leaders began to realize the cachet local personalities would bring to the party list. In some parties, volunteer recruitment strategies also improved after NDI training, increasing parties' membership base. For example, the Socialists focused on door-to-door recruitment drives and surveys and were able to increase their membership.

Extensive training outside of Tbilisi has helped parties disseminate party objectives among regional party leaders and learn about local issues of concern. Some of the parties' tactical objectives, such as relying on direct voter contact techniques such as door-to-door campaigning are clearly understood and accepted by the parties. NDI observed regional leaders employing such methods. (See answer to the following question.) Efforts to include regional leaders in platform development have been less successful. National party leaders continue to dominate this process.

Have parties developed effective strategies for contesting elections? Are regional party organizations actively involved in implementing these strategies? Are they taking more advanced approaches to short and long-term planning? Have parties worked effectively with their faction members in Parliament to define institutional priorities, activate and organize regional structures, educate party membership, and collaborate in the development of electoral strategies?

In 1999, all of the parties with which NDI worked developed written campaign plans. The NDP drafted the most comprehensive plan, with a calendar, and for the most part stayed on schedule. All of the campaign plans made use of targeting key districts or groups of voters, with the NDP again having the most detailed targeting plan. Campaign

strategy called for improving the appeal of party literature by providing a concise description of the party's message and main campaign themes.

In an attempt to focus on specific weaknesses that hampered electoral performance, NDI discussed targeting with all of the parties before both local elections and in preparation for the parliamentary elections NDI also urged its parties to develop voter files, an essential component of targeting. In the spring of 1999, the NDP conducted a series of door-to-door canvassing operations to identify potential supporters. The information gathered during the canvass was placed in a database in the party's central headquarters and could be accessed by regional and village party branches.

The CUG also compiled an extensive voter database and with NDI's assistance developed a plan to distribute information to regional party leaders in 1999. The other parties have some form of a voter file system, but tend to be less organized and have difficulty disseminating information to regional party chapters. The main obstacle has been lack of funds to purchase computers for all of the regional party offices and the absence of trained personnel to maintain and to manage a computerized database. At the request of several of NDI's party partners, the Institute conducted training for party staff on voter database development and management in early 1999.

Other campaign methods, long-promoted by NDI such as door-to-door campaigning and the use of meetings and rallies to promote voter contact, are now commonly used in Georgia. In 1998, the People's Party made greatest use of these techniques, effectively utilizing local elections to raise its political profile outside of Tbilisi. NDI observed that a number of People's Party majoritarian candidates used trained activists for door-to-door campaigning. Earlier in the year, in February, NDI was pleased to learn that the NDP had already implemented NDI recommendations and completed door-to-door canvassing in two districts in Tbilisi. Throughout the spring of 1999, NDP contacted over 5,000 voters in Tbilisi to determine the level of NDP support in targeted districts in the capital. From May to June, the NDP trained volunteers in the regions and conducted similar door-to-door campaigning in targeted regions throughout Georgia.

NDI observed progress in parties' development of in-house training capacity, which enabled them to more widely disseminate these techniques. The PP established its own team of party campaign trainers who systematically trained dozens of local activists. In 1999 the PP successfully expanded this program, utilizing internal trainers to disseminate information and to train local party organizers throughout the country. PP trainers began operating independently of NDI, developing their own schedule of training activities and working with local party activists and regional organizers. They focused on door-to-door campaign methods including targeting for majoritarian seats in Tbilisi and other cities. In addition to voter contact techniques, the People's Party provided local activists with training on election monitoring and election procedures.

These efforts did not go unnoticed by rival parties, who subsequently requested more intensive training from NDI. The NDP, initially hesitant to conduct its own training,

requested additional assistance from NDI to train trainers for the regions in spring 1999. NDP ultimately set up its own training-of-trainers programs.

See parliamentary development section for discussion of party-faction relations.

D. Local Government

Georgia's first local government elections in 1998 brought more than 10,000 local council members into office. Since 1996, NDI has contributed to legislative debates on establishing this system of elected local government. (See description of 1997 activities under "parliamentary development.") NDI worked with ISFED on an extensive public education program to explain new council members' rights and responsibilities to voters. (See "civic development" section.) Following local government elections, NDI in 1999, began providing assistance to newly elected council members. A conference organized by NDI in February 1999 resulted in the creation of the Councils Association of Georgia (CAG). Through a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy, NDI has assisted the Councils Association in establishing its organization and providing services to members.

Objective

- Increase public understanding and participation through institutionalizing the process and activities to be undertaken by new local governments.

Activities

From February 2-9, 1999, NDI and ISFED conducted the first seminar for newly elected local officials in Georgia through financial support from the Academy for Educational Development. The two-session conference was designed to provide newly elected members of district councils with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the recently enacted Georgian Law on Local Self-Governance and to help them better understand their roles and responsibilities.

To maximize the impact of training and to lay the groundwork for future cooperation in council proceedings, both the council chairman and the leader of the largest opposition party in each of 65 rayon councils were invited. The 130 attendees participated in interactive training with group discussions and working group sessions led by local government experts, Wally Rogers from the U.S. and Sigurd Hauff from Germany. Other presenters included representatives of the Georgian Tax and Finance Ministries, other government departments and NGO leaders.

As mentioned above, ISFED conducted numerous activities aimed at improving public understanding of local government and increasing interaction between citizens and elected officials in 1999 including town hall meetings, Citizens' Advisory Committee meetings and a civic education media campaign on the role of local councils.

Councils Association of Georgia

Following a discussion on local council associations at the NDI conference in February, NDI assisted in the creation of a multi-partisan working group interested in establishing such an association in Georgia. In May 1999, more than 200 local council members from across the country gathered to create the Councils Association of Georgia (CAG). This association, made up of a General Assembly, Board of Local Representatives, Board of Directors, and an Executive Office, set as its primary goals the establishment of interregional communications and training, and advocacy for local government legislation and procedures.

Through a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy, NDI assisted the Board of Directors in opening the CAG Executive Office in Tbilisi and recruiting qualified staff including an executive director, lawyer and accountant. The staff of the Executive Office worked with the Board of Directors to establish the Association, organize board meetings and set up regional branches. The Executive Office quickly became a communication center for local councillors, fielding numerous calls a day from members across the country interested in local government legislation, legal expertise, and funding opportunities.

The first CAG National Conference was held on March 17, 2000 in Tbilisi, and was attended by more than 400 council members, all regional governors, and the highest-ranking political figures in the country, including President Shevardnadze. CAG delegates approved a charter at the conference, establishing a multi-partisan Board of Directors with regional representation.

Beginning in spring 2000, NDI and CAG have been conducting seminars on budget review, approval and implementation in such districts as Dusheti, Akhaltsikhe, Dedoplistkaro, Rustavi and Kutaisi.

Evaluation

Have local administrations taken steps to adjust to changes in their authorities and obligations consistent with newly drafted laws?

While the 1998 local elections were an important step forward, Parliament did not pass crucial laws, such as those on local budget and property, which were necessary to give local elected councils real power and access to revenues. Thus, there have been few instances in which councils have been able to effectively use their right to approve local budgets and community plans. In the Adigeni, Baghdati and Gori districts councils have sent the budgets back to executives with recommended changes that were subsequently included into the budgets. In most cases, however, the councils' review has been a formal exercise. Less significant changes that were mandated by law have been accepted by

most local executive administrations after initial resistance. Executives have, for example, begun sharing their staffs and office spaces with the newly elected councils

Are these changes in policy resulting in more democratic practices?

Some councils have taken notable initiatives to open their doors and to reach out to the public. For example, the Poti and Gori city councils and the Ozurgeti and Chokhadauri district councils have held open office hours for constituents. The Ozurgeti district council also published a local newspaper. As noted above, existing legislation does not give sufficient authority to elected councils to enable them to move forward with democratic reforms

Do legislators and the public understand the implications of the new laws and system?

The past three years has been an experiment in local government for Georgia. Recent initiatives in parliament, spurred in part by lobbying by local council members, demonstrate that they are aware of the weaknesses in the existing system. In the coming months, the parliament is expected to draft a package of laws that will hopefully begin to re-allocate authority from appointed local executives to local councils. Through CAG, councilors across the country have begun to advocate for these legislative changes.

Have communities adopted mechanisms or practices that enable citizens to participate in local decision-making processes and affairs?

ISFED's Citizen's Advisory Committees have been a mechanism for citizen input into local decision-making. (See "civic development" section.) These meetings have addressed issues including, privatization, local budgets, corruption, unpaid salaries and pensions. Through the work of ISFED's Citizens' Advisory Committees, citizens are now beginning to work with the local administration to set spending priorities in their communities.

In the months and years ahead NDI will focus on helping ISFED expand its citizen participation and advocacy activities in the regions. The Institute will also advise political parties on strengthening regional branches in preparation for local government elections in 2001. NDI will seek to help reform parliamentarians to build on a record of achievement to strengthen constituent servicing, oversight and development of legislation. The Institute will also continue to assist the Councils Association of Georgia to influence important local government legislation, as well as improve its internal operations and services to members.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Though Georgia has deservedly earned its reputation as one of the more democratic of the post-Soviet states, many internal and external problems remain. Growing and unchecked corruption, continuing territorial problems, difficulties with ethnic and

religious minorities, worsening standards of living, stagnant unemployment rates, and especially the irregularities that marred the recent presidential election raise questions about the commitment of Georgia's leaders to consolidating the country's democratic direction.

Despite these daunting problems, progress is visible. Political and civic activists remain committed to the cause of democratic reform, have organized on behalf of that goal, and seen positive results. Government efforts at reform continue. The central government has begun an initiative to bring corruption under control and the local government has made progress in establishing a role separate from the federal level. In this political context, NDI was able to achieve most of the objectives it set under the cooperative agreement. These successes are a testament both to the effectiveness of NDI's training and to the determination its recipients.